

The Episode of the Seldon Gold Mine.

The Schemes of Colonel Clay

BY GRANT ALLEN.

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On our return to London Charles and Marviller had a difference of opinion on the subject of Medhurst.

Charles maintained that Marviller ought to have known the man with the cropped hair was Colonel Clay, and ought never to have recommended him. Marviller maintained that Charles had seen Colonel Clay half a dozen times, at least, to his own never; and that his respected brother-in-law had therefore nobody on earth but himself to blame if the rogue imposed upon him.

The head detective had known Medhurst for ten years, he said, as a most respectable man, and even a ratepayer; he had always found him the cleverest of spies, as well he might be, indeed, on the familiar set-a-thief-to-catch-a-thief principle. However, the upshot of it all was, as usual—nothing. Marviller was sorry to lose the services of so excellent a hand, but he had done the very best he could for Sir Charles, he declared, and if Sir Charles was not satisfied, why, he might catch his Colonel Clays for himself in future.

"So I will, Sey," Charles remarked to me as he walked back from the office in the Strand to Piccadilly. "I won't trust any more to those private detectives. It's my belief they're a pack of thieves themselves, in league with the rascals they're set to catch, and with no more sense of honor than a Zulu diamond hand."

"Better try the police," I suggested, by way of being helpful. One must assume an interest in one's employer's business.

But Charles shook his head. "No, no," he said; "I'm sick of all these fellows. I shall trust in future to my own sagacity. We learn by experience, Sey—and I've learned a thing or two. One of them is this: It's not enough to suspect everybody; you must have no preconceptions. Divest yourself entirely of every fixed idea if you wish to cope with a rascal of this caliber. Don't jump at conclusions. We should disbelieve everything, as well as distrust everybody. That's the road to success, and I mean to pursue it."

So, by the way of pursuing it, Charles retired to Seldon.

"The longer the man goes on, the worse he grows," he said to me one morning. "He's just like a tiger that has tasted blood. Every successful haul seems only to make him more eager for another. I fully expect now before long we shall see him down here."

About three weeks later, sure enough, my respected connection received a communication from the abandoned swindler, with an Austrian stamp and a Vienna post mark.

"My Dear Vandriff: (After so long and so varied an acquaintance we may surely drop the absurd formalities of 'Sir Charles' and 'Colonel.') I write to ask you a delicate question. Can you kindly tell me exactly how much I have received from your various generous acts during the last three years? I have mislaid my account book, and, as this is the season for making the income tax return, I am anxious as an honest and conscientious citizen, to set down my average profits out of you for the triennial period."

"For reasons which you will simply understand, I do not this time give my private address, in Paris or elsewhere; but if you will kindly advertise the total amount, above the signature 'Peter Simple,' in the Agony column of the Times, you will confer a great favor upon the revenue commissioners, and also upon your constant friend and companion, CUTHBERT CLAY."

"Mark my word, Sey," Charles said, laying the letter down, "in a week or less the man himself will follow. This is his cunning way of trying to make me think he's well out of the country and far away from Seldon. That means he's meditating another descent. But he told us too much last time, when he was Medhurst, the detective. He gave us some hints about disguises and their unmasking that I shall not forget. This turn I shall be even with him."

On Saturday of that week, in effect, we were walking along the road that leads into the village, when we met a gentlemanly looking man, in a rough and happy-go-lucky brown tweed suit, who had the air of a tourist. He was middle-aged and of medium height; he wore a small leather wallet suspended round his shoulder, and he was peering about at the rocks in a suspicious manner. Something in his gait attracted our attention.

"Good morning," he said, looking up at us as we passed, and Charles muttered a somewhat surly, inarticulate "Good morning."

We went on without saying more. "Well, that's a good one, Sey," I said as we got out of earshot. "For he accosted us first, and you may

remember it's one of the colonel's most marked peculiarities that, like the model child, he never speaks till he's spoken to—never begins an acquaintance. He always waits till we make the first advance; he doesn't go out of his way to cheat us; he loiters about till we ask him to do it."

"Seymour," my brother-in-law responded, in a severe tone, "there you are, now, doing the very thing I warned you not to do! You're succumbing to a preconception. Avoid fixed probabilities. The probability is this man is Colonel Clay. Strangers are generally scarce at Seldon. If he isn't Colonel Clay, what's he here for, I'd like to know? What money is there to be made here, in any other way? I shall inquire about him."

We dropped in at the "Cromarty Arms," and asked good Mrs. McLachlan if she could tell us anything about the gentlemanly stranger. Mrs. McLachlan replied that he was from London, she believed, a pleasant gentleman enough; and he had his wife with him.

"Ha! Young? Pretty?" Charles inquired, with a speaking glance at me. "Well, Sir Charles, she'll no be exactly what you'd be calling a bonny lass," Mrs. McLachlan replied; "but she's a guid body for a' that, an' a fine braw woman."

"Just what I should expect," Charles murmured. "He varies the program. The fellow has tried 'White Heather' as the parson's wife, and as Madame Picardet, and as squinting little Mrs. Granton, and as Medhurst's accomplice; and now he has almost exhausted the possibilities of a disguise for a really young and pretty woman; so he's really hung off at last as the ripe product—a handsome matron. Clever, extremely clever; but—we begin to see through him." And he chuckled to himself quietly.

Next day, on the hillside, we came upon our stranger again, occupied as before in peering into the rocks, and sounding them with a hammer. Charles nudged me and whispered, "I have it this time. He's passing as a geologist. I took a good look at the man. By now, of course, we had some experience of Colonel Clay in his various disguises; and I could observe that while the nose, the hair and the beard were varied, the eyes and the build remained the same as ever."

He was a trifle stout, of course, being got up as a man of between 40 and 50; and his forehead was lined in a way which a less consummate artist than Colonel Clay could easily have imitated. But I felt we had at least some grounds for our identification; it would not do to dismiss the suggestion of Clayhood at once as a flight of fancy.

His wife was sitting near, upon a bare boss of rock, reading a volume of poems. Capital variant, that, a volume of poems. Exactly suited the selected type of cultivated family. "White Heather" and Mrs. Granton never used to read poems. But that was characteristic of all Colonel Clay's impersonations, and Mrs. Clay, too, for I suppose I must call her so. They were not mere outer disguisers; they were finished pieces of dramatic study. Those two people were an actor and actress, as well as a pair of rogues; and in both their roles they were simply formidable.

As a rule, Charles is by no means polite to casual trespassers on the Seldon estate; they got shore shift and a summary ejection. But on this occasion he had a reason for being courteous, and he approached the lady with a bow of recognition.

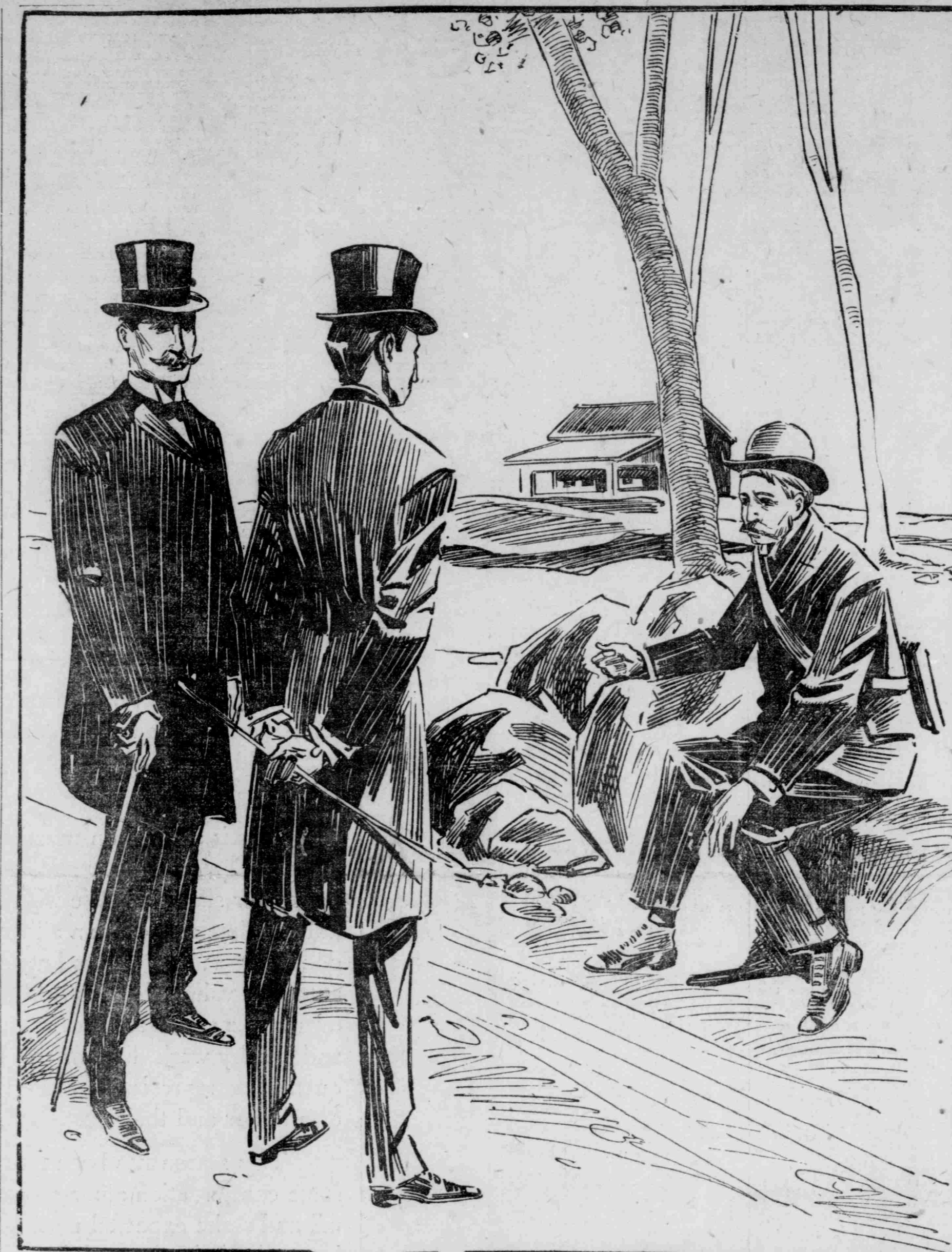
"Lovely day," he said, "isn't it? Such belts on the sea, and the heather smells sweet. You are stopping at the inn, I fancy?"

"Yes," the lady answered, looking up at him with a charming smile. ("I know that smile," Charles whispered to me, "I have been accustomed to it too often.") "We're stopping at the inn, and my husband is doing a little geology on the hill here. I hope, Sir Charles Vandriff won't come and catch us. He's so down upon trespassers. They tell us at the inn he's a regular tartar."

"(Saucy mix as ever," Charles murmured to me. "She said it on purpose.") "No, my dear madam," he continued, "you have been quite misinformed. I am Sir Charles Vandriff; and I am not a tartar. If your husband is a man of science I respect and admire him. It is geology that has made me what I am today. And he drew himself up proudly. "We owe to the present development of South Africa mining."

The lady blushed as one seldom sees a mature woman blush—but exactly as I had seen Mme. Picardet and "White Heather."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said, in a confused way that recalled Mrs. Granton.



"Good Morning," He Said, As We Passed

ton. "Forgive my hasty speech. I—I didn't know you."

"(She did," Charles whispered. "But let that pass.") "You have been quite misinformed. I am Sir Charles Vandriff; and I am not a tartar. If your husband is a man of science I respect and admire him. It is geology that has made me what I am today. And he drew himself up proudly. "We owe to the present development of South Africa mining."

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at him quaintly. "I admire your wish, though not your reservation. I've just been reading those sweet lines of Wordsworth's: 'And O, ye fountains, meadows, hills and groves, Forebode not any severing of our loves.'"

I suppose you know them?" And she beamed on him pleasantly. "Know them?" Charles answered. "Know them! Oh, of course, I know them. They're old favorites of mine—in fact, I admire Wordsworth." (I doubted whether Charles has ever in his life read a line of poetry except

Doss Chideros in the Sporting Times.) He took the book and glanced at them. "Ah, charming, charming," he said in his most ecstatic tone. But his eyes were on the lady and not on the poet.

I saw in a moment how things stood. No matter what disguise that woman appeared to him, and whether he recognized her or not, Charles couldn't help falling a victim to Mine.

Picardet's attractions. Here he actually suspected her; yet, like a moth round a candle, he was trying his hardest to get his wings singed. I almost despised him with his gigantic intellect! The greatest men are the

greatest fools. I verily believe, when there's a woman in question.

The husband strolled up by this time, and entered into conversation with us. According to his own account, his name was Forbes-Gaskell, and he was a professor of geology in one of those new-fangled northern colleges. He had come to Seldon rock-spying, he said, and found much to interest him. He was fond of fossils, but his special hobby was rocks and minerals. He knew a vast deal about cairngorms and agates and such like pretty things, and red cornelian, and I don't know what else, in crags on the hillside.

We went in to lunch. The professor and Mrs. Forbes-Gaskell, all smiles, accompanied us. I don't know whether it was Charles' warning to take nothing for granted that made me do so—or I kept a close eye upon the suspected man all the time we were at table. It struck me there was something very odd about his hair. It didn't seem quite the same color all over. The locks that hung down behind, over the collar of his coat, were a trifle lighter and a trifle grayer than the black mass that covered the greater part of his head. I examined it carefully. The more I did so, the more the conviction

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The Hotel Clerk on Holiday Prospects

BY IRVIN S. COBB.

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"Well," said the Hotel Clerk, "it may be true that this is a time of severe depression among those who never felt the cruel pinch of a wintry Wall street before; it may be true that Vested Rights has lost its vest and is now going around in its shirt sleeves with a tattered pair of Gobiell tapestries wrapped around its bent shoulders, bagging pennies with which to buy a crack of cold poison to send to the White House as a Christmas present. Mind you, I'm not saying these things aren't correct, only I take notice that the shop windows don't show any falling off from last year in the number of sets of forty-dollar choo-choo cars and French dolls that could pass for babies if they didn't look so intelligent."

"I guess, after all, it'll be like any other Christmas you can remember. Anyway, I know of at least two well known parties that are going right ahead for their preparations for the merriest kind of a Yuletide. You'll recall one of them as soon as I describe him, Larry. He's an elderly person, somewhat gray and wrinkled, and he's slipping around now, doing a little here and a little there, taking a pinch falling off from last year in the number of sets of forty-dollar choo-choo cars and French dolls that could pass for babies if they didn't look so intelligent."

"I know who you mean already," said the House Detective of the Hotel St. Rockless.

"To be sure you do," said the Hotel

Clerk. "Everybody ought to know who I mean half a second after I start in telling about him. He's had a busy fall. They've kept making demands on him, but nobody has caught him fretting or complaining. In every home great or humble, or once great and now humble, as many of them are, they're feeling his influence. It'll be many a long day before the harassed financiers down town what he's been doing on their accounts, and in the tempests of the poor they'll soon be whispering his name as the even-lambs are lit. But he gives no sign—he just keeps on with his work, wearing a modest smile on his long, smooth face, and—"

"Long, smooth face?" echoed the House Detective, in astonishment.

"What talk have you? Since when did Santa Claus get a shave?"

"Who said anything about Santa Claus?" said the Hotel Clerk. "An' what's that got to do with the modern celebration of Christmas, anyway? He only puts things in a stocking; he never makes you take the long green out of it. I was speaking of the old-fashioned fellow. Who else would I be speaking of?"

"It ought to be a grand Christmas for Rockefeller. Of course, Morgan has something to celebrate, but not as much as Rockefeller. When Wall Street in its hour of need was calling for a bale of shingles, 'twas Morgan generously came to the relief. But all Morgan got for his trouble was the

roof and the top story while Uncle John, who furnished the nails, took the rest of the establishment. Ryan was discovered in the act of trying to get away with the lead pipe of the bathroom fixtures and part of the contents of the pantry, but was stopped in time. The former proprietors are now camping in the hole where the foundations used to be, waiting to be evicted. Yes, I think on the whole it ought to be a merry Christmas for John D.—bless his old soul—especially as it looks like kerosene ain't going to fall many cents per gallon between now and Jan. 1."

"Who was the other happy party you mentioned a minute ago?" asked the House Detective.

"His name is Bryan," said the Hotel Clerk. "William Jennings Bryan, known as the Boy Orator of the Platte, before that stream got into the way of occasionally drying up, a habit which unfits it for association with the gentleman I have named. Mr. Bryan is a happy and contented farmer now. That is to say, he's still a candidate by profession and working regularly at the trade, but he does farming as a sideline. He's quite a success considering that he has to be all the time listening for the Voice of Destiny or the voice of Tom Taggart or one of the other voices that are prominently identified with the party. I guess he's probably the only farmer in the world that plows while keeping one ear to the ground."

"He sleeps in the second story of his cozy farm house, but I'm told there's a brass ball running through the floor, the same as they have at an engine house, so he can come sliding down when the voice begins to sibilate across the rolling Nebraska prairies. There's no need for him to leave a calling out the hole where the foundations used to be, waiting to be evicted. Yes, I think on the whole it ought to be a merry Christmas for John D.—bless his old soul—especially as it looks like kerosene ain't going to fall many cents per gallon between now and Jan. 1."

"If for any reason the voice should be delayed he can fix that, too. He's a versatile man, Bryan is; he'll double in voice."

"He'll just step in the wings for a minute. (Noise without.) One of the lesser members of the cast, say a member of the national committee, is temporarily occupying the stage. He looks off R. I. U. 'What's that?' says the minor performer. 'Can it be the cry of the angry mob?' No, no, praise heavens, 'tis the Voice of Destiny calling upon our beloved leader to gird on his white lawn tie and go forth to do battle against the common foe. Then the minor performer runs off and Mr. Bryan comes back on and says, 'Hark, the call of me party! This well, I will answer it. Cincinnati never yet laid down on this job!'"

"And he shucks off his overalls and climbs into his black truck coat with the two buttons in the middle of the back and has his hair all swept back from his forehead in the modified mar-

cel design known among hairdressers as the statesman's roach, before you have time to say Jack Robinson or Joe Folk or any common word like that."

"Yes, Larry, at this time Mr. Bryan is out yonder in Lincoln feeling in every way pleased with the outlook. He's wearing that familiar and beloved smile of his that runs all the way round and hooks at the back like a clergyman's collar. He knows what he's going to find on the tree on Christmas morning. He knows, because he's already hung it there and he's sitting up nights to see that no Swede named Johnson from Minnesota or anybody from Texas or Tennessee gets a chance to swipe it."

"Mr. Bryan came out in an article in his paper a few days ago and told all about the situation. You might have thought he was writing about himself, but he wasn't. His topic was the situation. I quote him from the immortal document:

"The enemy are scattered and disorganized," says Mr. Bryan. "As shown by the late election returns, they're scattered all over the country. In the southwest they're badly disorganized. Many of the rough riders have sons growing up for whom no federal jobs have as yet been provided. There have been postoffice fights in many of the cities. Some of the Republicans are openly for Roosevelt for a third term. Some of them are for Roosevelt, but not so openly—I refer to the Taft following. Some of them are for Fair-

banks—Mr. Fairbanks himself and two close friends of the Fairbanks family living in Indianapolis."

"Whereas, on the other hand, the Democratic party is a compact and solidified mass, located just south of Kentucky. I never recall a time when the Democrats were so solidified. The Republicans quarrel among themselves over this issue or that, but do you hear us quarreling over any issues? You do not, one reason being that we haven't any yet. But do not be distressed, my countrymen. I will from time to time think up issues for you. I always have."

"It would be useless for me to deny that our party has made mistakes in the past. We committed a very grave mistake in the campaign of 1904, it's name being Parker—Alfred Parker or Abel Parker or some such person. However, that is of no moment. I feel justified in saying that as long as I keep my health and vocal powers—our party will never again fall into a similar error. Besides, I have a fine boy growing up and Lincoln is rapidly becoming a having a standard bearer regularly in its midst."

"Did he say all that?" asked the House Detective.

"He said more than that," continued the Hotel Clerk. "He said it was a frightful thing that people would advocate a third term for president. Mind you he didn't say a third race—but a third term."

"I wonder what the main issue will

be next year?" said the House Detective.

"I don't know yet," said the Hotel Clerk. "But it won't be hard to find it. All that is needed in the way of an issue will be something that won't offend the formerly rich men of the east or the formerly poor men of the west; something that will not do violence to any of the south's sacred institutions, such as the Jim Crow car, and at the same time won't alienate the sensitive leaders of the colored wing of the Tammany Democracy; something that will bring joy to the hearts of the free trade Democrats and not disappoint the high tariff Democrats. I think myself a short, simple declaration, calling for pure milk and the suppression of the Black Hand society will fill the bill reasonably well. Anyway, it's a good chance for your back-numbered friend, Santa Claus."

"What's a good chance?" asked the House Detective.

"Why, a chance to bring Mr. Bryan's party a satisfactory issue as a Christmas gift," said the Hotel Clerk. "If he can do that the old man may be able to hang on a while longer. Otherwise, I look to see his entire business taken over pretty soon by the Christmas Cheer company, Limited, incorporated under the laws of New Jersey by Rockefeller, Morgan and August Belmont."

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